

JANUARY 5, 1978

VICTOR REUTHER AND THE UAW
(INSERTS AVAILABLE IN TAPE LIBRARY)

ANNCR: MOST AMERICANS IMMEDIATELY THINK OF DETROIT, MICHIGAN WHEN THEY THINK OF AUTOMOBILES. KNOWN AS MOTOR CITY, THIS CAPITAL OF THE U.S. AUTO INDUSTRY IS INSEPARABLY LINKED WITH THE MOTOR CAR. FOR THE MANY MEN AND WOMEN WHO WORK IN THE INDUSTRY, THE NAME OF REUTHER IS JUST AS CLOSELY TIED WITH THE POWERFUL LABOR UNION THAT REPRESENTS THEM. IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE UNITED AUTO WORKERS UNION THERE WERE THREE REUTHER BROTHERS...WALTER, ROY AND VICTOR. TODAY, VICTOR, THE YOUNGEST, CAN LOOK BACK WITH A KEEN PERSPECTIVE ON THE STRUGGLES IN THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT. HERE IS ----- WITH THE DETAILS.

NARR: VICTOR REUTHER IS NOW IN HIS MID-SIXTIES AND RETIRED. THE UNITED AUTO WORKERS UNION COUNTS OVER A MILLION MEMBERS AND REPRESENTS VIRTUALLY ALL WORKERS EMPLOYED IN THE PRODUCTION OF MOTOR VEHICLES AND AUTO PARTS AS WELL AS A LARGE NUMBER IN THE AIRCRAFT AND SPACE INDUSTRIES.

TODAY THE UNITED STATES AUTO WORKERS UNION IS A POWERFUL FORCE ON THE AMERICAN ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SCENE. BUT BACK IN THE MID-THIRTIES, WHEN VICTOR REUTHER STARTED HIS INDUSTRIAL CAREER TURNING OUT 600 WHEEL AND BRAKE DRUMS AN HOUR AT DETROIT'S KELSEY HAYES WHEEL FACTORY, THINGS WERE VERY DIFFERENT.

TAPE: CUT ONE - VICTOR REUTHER

"I WAS INTERESTED IN HELPING TO FORM A UNION BECAUSE, IN THOSE DAYS, THE WORKERS WERE NOT ORGANIZED INTO A UNION, AND THE COMPANY ATTITUDE WAS ONE OF GREAT ARROGANCE AND WORKERS WERE DISCHARGED AT WILL, AND THERE WAS NO ASSURANCE THAT AFTER A TEMPORARY LAYOFF YOU WOULD BE CALLED BACK OR AT WHAT WAGES."

NARR: AS IN MOST OTHER INDUSTRIAL COUNTRIES DURING THE SAME PERIOD, THE STRUGGLES IN THE UNITED STATES TO UNIONIZE THE WORKERS WERE STORMY, FREQUENTLY VIOLENT. DESPITE THE ODDS, VICTOR REUTHER, AND HIS BROTHER WALTER-- WHO BECAME PRESIDENT OF THE UAW IN 1946 -- PERSISTED - EVEN SURVIVING ASSASSINATION ATTEMPTS. WALTER WAS TO DIE LATER IN A PLANE CRASH IN 1970.

THE REUTHER BROTHER'S FATHER WAS A GERMAN IMMIGRANT, A BREWERY WORKER, WHO, IN THE WORDS OF WALTER, WAS "AN OLD FIGHTER IN THE RANKS OF LABOR, A TRADE UNIONIST FROM WAY BACK WHEN THE GOING WAS ROUGH." VICTOR RECALLS WHEN HIS FATHER TOOK HIS SONS TO VISIT AMERICAN SOCIALIST PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE EUGENE V. DEBS IN JAIL FOR HIS PACIFISM DURING WORLD WAR ONE.

LATER IN THE DEPRESSION YEARS OF THE NINETEEN THIRTIES, VICTOR AND HIS BROTHERS WERE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS -- SEEKING WHAT SEEMED IN THOSE DAYS AN ELUSIVE GOAL -- SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR THE WORKERS. VICTOR DESCRIBES HIS FIRST STRIKE...

TAPE: CUT TWO -- REUTHER

"WALTER WAS INVOLVED, AND THERE WERE MANY WORKERS OF COURSE, MANY POLISH WOMEN WHO WORKED IN THERE, AND YUGOSLAVS AND CZECHS, AND WE HAD A LITTLE EUROPE IN THERE, AND SOME OF THEM, OF COURSE, CAME WITH GOOD TRADE UNION FAMILY BACKGROUNDS, AND IN THE BEGINNING, AS FAST AS WE WOULD ORGANIZE THEM, THEY WOULD BE FIRED, BECAUSE EVERY TIME WE HELD A MEETING WITH AS MANY AS FOUR OR FIVE, ONE AMONG THEM WOULD REPORT BACK TO THE COMPANY. THAT WAS CUSTOMARY THEN. THEY HIRED THEIR STOOL PIGEONS OR SPIES. AND ONE DAY ONE OF THE WOMEN WHO WAS BEING PUSHED TOO FAST ON THE JOB ACTUALLY

TAPE: FAINED, AND IT CREATED A VERY EMOTIONAL SITUATION. AND WE
(CONT'D) KNEW WE'D HAVE TO DO SOMETHING QUITE DRAMATIC BECAUSE THE
WORKERS WERE WORKING UNDER SUCH FEAR AT THAT TIME, AND SO
WE SUGGESTED TO HER IN A VERY PRIVATE LITTLE MEETING WE HAD
ONE NIGHT AT HER OWN HOME THAT SHE FAINT AGAIN, ONLY THIS
TIME ON SCHEDULE. (LAUGHTER). AND SHE AGREED TO FAINT
AGAIN, ONLY WE SUGGESTED SHE DO IT JUST BEFORE THE SECOND
SHIFT CAME ON SO WE COULD POOL OUR MAXIMUM UNION MEMBERSHIP
FROM THE TWO SHIFTS. AND SHE FAINTED. AND I WALKED OVER
AND PULLED THE SWITCH THEN, AND DOWN WENT THE FACTORY. AND
THERE WAS CONSTERNATION AMONG THE WORKERS; THEY DIDN'T KNOW
HOW TO RESPOND AT FIRST, BUT THEY ALL AGREED WITH US THAT
A UNION NEEDED TO BE ORGANIZED, AND THAT DRAMATIC GESTURE
BROKE THE ICE. AND THE FOREMAN CAME BOUNCING DOWN THROUGH
THE SHOP DEMANDING WE GET BACK TO WORK, AND WE SAID, 'OH, NO.
WE GOTTA HAVE A UNION BEFORE WE CAN GO TO WORK.' AND THAT
WAS THE BEGINNING."

NARR: MISTER REUTHER SAID THAT AFTER THAT INITIAL TWO-DAY STRIKE,
HIS WAGES INCREASED FROM 33½ CENTS PER HOUR TO A GUARANTEED
MINIMUM OF 75 CENTS. THE STRIKE ALSO ESTABLISHED THE
PRINCIPLE OF EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK AND WON RECOGNITION FOR
THE UNION. AND INSTEAD OF THE INITIAL 78 UNION MEMBERS,
WITHIN WEEKS ALL FIVE THOUSAND IN THE PLANT WERE IN THE
UNION. MISTER REUTHER SAID THAT PARTICULAR FACTORY REMAINS
A STRONGHOLD OF THE UNITED AUTOMOBILE WORKERS TO THIS DAY.
THE UNION'S BIGGEST BATTLES CAME 40 YEARS AGO. IN THE
CHARGED ATMOSPHERE OF THE TIME, NEWSPAPERS HELPED TO SPREAD
THE WORD ABOUT THE STRIKES AND THE RESULTING, ALTHOUGH
GRUDGING, ACCEPTANCE OF LABOR UNIONS. THE FIRST MAJOR STRIKE
CAME AGAINST THE LARGEST OF THE AUTOMOBILE COMPANIES...
GENERAL MOTORS. VICTOR REUTHER REMEMBERS...

TAPE: CUT THREE -- REUTHER

"IT INVOLVED BETTER THAN 300 THOUSAND WORKERS ALL ACROSS THE
UNITED STATES AND CANADA -- AND A SITDOWN STRIKE IN WHICH
THE WORKERS ACTUALLY OCCUPIED DEPARTMENTS OF FISHER I AND
FISHER BODY NUMBER II BROKE OUT IN FLINT. WE HADN'T REALLY
PLANNED IT THAT WAY -- OUR UNION WAS MUCH, MUCH TOO SMALL --
BUT IT HAPPENED BECAUSE I THINK THE CORPORATION IN
DESPERATION WAS TRYING TO AVOID UNIONIZATION AND RESORTED TO

TAPE: (CONT'D) EVEN GREATER INTIMIDATION; AND THERE AGAIN AFTER THE STRIKE HAD BEEN ON SOME TIME AND MAJOR NEGOTIATIONS WERE STALLED, IF IT HAD NOT BEEN FOR A REPORTER CALLING TO OUR ATTENTION AGAIN THAT COMMITMENTS THAT THE CORPORATION MADE TO US WERE NOT GENUINE AND THEY WERE MADE ONLY TO GET OUR WORKERS TO EVACUATE THE FACTORIES. AND HAD WE EVACUATED AT THAT POINT WE TOO WOULD HAVE LOST THE STRIKE. AND HERE AGAIN THE COURAGEOUS ACTIONS OF A FREE PRESS, WHICH WAS FREE TO REPORT THE FACTS TO THE WORKERS AND THE PUBLIC AT LARGE WAS VITAL TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF OUR FREE AND DEMOCRATIC UNION."

NARR: THE INTERESTS OF THE REUTHER BROTHERS WERE NOT JUST CONFINED TO THOSE OF THE AMERICAN WORKER. FOR MANY YEARS BEFORE HIS RETIREMENT, VICTOR REUTHER WAS DIRECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS FOR THE U-A-W. AND IN THE 1930'S, HE AND BROTHER WALTER FOLLOWED THE DARKENING CLOUDS IN EUROPE -- THE DISTURBING NEWS ABOUT THE RISE OF ADOLF HITLER. AND THEY DECIDED TO SIGN UP WHEN THEY LEARNED THAT FORD WAS BUILDING A FACTORY IN THE SOVIET UNION.

TAPE: CUT FOUR -- REUTHER

"WE HAD FRIENDS WHO HAD WORKED WITH US IN THE DETROIT FORD FACTORY WHO HAD MADE THE FRIENDSHIP AND ACQUAINTANCE OF SOME SOVIET AUTO WORKERS WHO WERE BEING TRAINED BY THE FORD MOTOR COMPANY TO BUILD A FACTORY: THE GORKY AVTOMOBILNY ZAVOD IMINI MOLOTOVA, IN THE SOVIET UNION. AND WE LEARNED FROM THEM THAT THEY NEEDED TECHNICIANS AND WE APPLIED AND WERE GIVEN A JOB. AND FOR TWO YEARS WE WORKED IN THE AUTOMOBILE FACTORY IN THE SOVIET UNION."

NARR: VICTOR AND WALTER REUTHER JOURNEYED TO THEIR NEW JOB IN THE USSR THROUGH GERMANY/-- AND WERE IN HAMBURG WHEN THE REICHSTAG BUILDINGS WAS SET ON FIRE...

TAPE: CUT FIVE -- REUTHER

OP ✓ "AND WE RUSHED TO GO TO BERLIN AND WE WERE AMONG THE FIRST CONDUCTED ON THE PROPAGANDA TOUR THROUGH THE SMOLDERING RUINS OF THE REICHSTAG BUILDING, AND WE WITNESSED PERSONALLY, WE LIVED THROUGH THOSE HORRIBLE DAYS WHEN HITLER BEGAN TO DESTROY SUCH BASIC FREEDOMS THAT EXISTED IN GERMANY... OF COURSE, HIS FIRST MOVE WAS TO SUPPRESS THE PRESS, TO TAKE

TAPE:
(CONT'D)

OVER AND CONTROL THE NEWSPAPERS SO THAT THERE WOULD BE ONLY ONE SIDE OF THE STORY, ONLY ONE VOICE REPORTING TO GERMAN PEOPLE, AND NATURALLY THAT WAS TO BE THE VOICE OF HITLER'S PROPAGANDA MINISTERS. AND HAVING TAKEN OVER THE PRESS, HE BEGAN TO MOVE AGAINST ANY OPPOSITION POLITICAL PARTIES: THE CATHOLIC PARTY, THE SOCIALIST PARTY."

NARR:

VICTOR REUTHER DESCRIBED VIVIDLY HOW THE NAZI STORMTROOPS TOOK OVER THE TRADE UNIONS AND SEIZED UNION BUILDINGS AND EQUIPMENT THAT THE GERMAN UNIONS HAD ACQUIRED WITH THEIR OWN MONEY. /AFTER HAVING WITNESSED NAZI GERMANY AND COMMUNIST RUSSIA, VICTOR REUTHER NOTED CERTAIN SIMILARITIES...

TAPE: CUT SIX -- REUTHER

"WELL, OF COURSE, THEY USED DIFFERENT TERMINOLOGY BUT ESSENTIALLY WHEN YOU HAVE ONE PARTY, WHICH IS THE STATE, WHICH IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL ACTIVITIES -- ALL ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES, ALL SOCIAL ACTIVITIES, ALL UNIONS ARE OPERATED AND FUNCTION UNDER THAT PARTY AND THAT STATE -- YOU HAVE ESSENTIALLY THE SAME THING. YOU MAY CALL IT BY DIFFERENT NAMES, BUT THE TRADE UNIONS INSIDE THE COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED COUNTRIES ARE NO MORE FREE UNIONS THAN WERE THE ARBEITS FRON* OF DR. LEE UNDER HITLER. THEY ARE PARTY-CONTROLLED, THEY ARE STATE-CONTROLLED. THEY ARE NOT TRADE UNIONS AS WE KNOW THEM IN THE WESTERN WORLD WHICH ARE FREE TO TAKE ACTION TO DEFEND THE INTERESTS OF THE WORKERS."

NARR:

MR. REUTHER NOTES WITH SATISFACTION THE RISE IN INCOME OF AN AMERICAN WORKER FROM THOSE EARLY DAYS IN DETROIT WHEN IT WAS 33 CENTS PER HOUR UP TO TODAY, WHEN A WORKER CAN EARN ABOUT SEVEN DOLLARS PER HOUR IN ACTUAL WAGES, PLUS SEVERAL ADDITIONAL DOLLARS PER HOUR IN FRINGE BENEFITS -- SUCH AS HEALTH BENEFITS, RETIREMENT BENEFITS, AND VACATION PAY. BUT, SAYS VICTOR, THERE IS SOMETHING ELSE OF GREATER IMPORTANCE.

TAPE: CUT SEVEN -- REUTHER

"WE HAD A GENERAL INSURANCE POLICY AGAINST ACCIDENTS IN THOSE DAYS WITH VERY MODEST BENEFITS, BUT IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO DRAW A CASH OR A MONETARY COMPARISON, BECAUSE THE CHANGES HAVE BEEN SO GREAT, SO ENORMOUS FOR THE BETTER. BUT IF I WERE TO PUT MY FINGER ON SOMETHING EVEN MORE IMPORTANT THAN

TAPE:
(CONT'D)

THE BETTER WAGES, AND THE HEALTH BENEFITS AND RETIREMENT AND ALL OF THIS THAT WE GET, I WOULD SAY THAT OUR PEOPLE HAVE WON SOMETHING MORE PRECIOUS THAN ALL THE MONEY AND THE HEALTH BENEFITS AND RETIREMENT BENEFITS. THEY'RE FREE PEOPLE. AND THEY CAN WALK INTO THE FACTORIES WITH THEIR HEADS HIGH, KNOWING FULL WELL THAT THEY DON'T HAVE TO TIP THEIR HAT TO THE BOSS, THEY DON'T HAVE TO CURRY THE FAVOR OF ANY POLITICIAN OR ANY POLITICAL GROUP. THEY HAVE A RIGHT TO THEIR OWN OPINIONS. THEY CAN TAKE ACTION TOGETHER IN A DEMOCRATIC WAY TO DEFEND THEIR RIGHTS -- AND THIS SENSE OF DIGNITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL WORKER, KNOWING THAT HE HAS EARNED RIGHTS OVER THE YEARS THAT NO ONE CAN TAKE FROM HIM AND THAT HE DOES NOT HAVE TO EXCHANGE THAT FOR THE PRICE OF, NOT JUST MONEY, BUT THROUGH THE LOSS OF HIS FREEDOM. HE DOESN'T HAVE TO PROTECT HIS WAGES BY GIVING UP HIS FREEDOM. AND THIS IS TERRIBLY IMPORTANT. AND I THINK THAT SENSE OF DIGNITY, THAT SENSE OF EQUALITY OF MEN AND WOMEN WORKERS ALIKE, WHITE AND BLACK WORKERS, ALL HAVING THE RIGHT TO THE SAME WAGE FOR DOING THE SAME JOB, THAT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE MONETARY GAINS WHICH THEY HAVE MADE BECAUSE THAT MAKES THEM NOT ONLY FREE PEOPLE, IT MAKES THEM INDEPENDENT PEOPLE. IT MAKES THEM PEOPLE WORTHY OF BELONGING TO THE HUMAN FAMILY."

NARR: VICTOR REUTHER.. ONE OF THE GREAT FIGURES IN THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT.

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